It’s YOUR Time: A Nonjudgmental Approach to Time Management
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What is time management?
Time management is taking a list of tasks for a specified period and doing them each at a particular time to optimize your efficiency. The concept sometimes reflects societal or corporate pressure to do more, but time management can also be empowering and help reduce stress. There is no one “correct” way to manage time, and your own approach can change over time.

Getting to Know Yourself: how are you wired?
- Do deadlines stress you out or keep you on task?
- What are your most productive hours in the day? In the week?
- How many hours are actually productive when you’re “at work”?
- What helps you stay on task? What distracts you? How much control do you have over those distractors, or how can you work around them? What kind of tasks (e.g., daily tedium, big ideas, social) do you tend to put off, and why (e.g., boring, requires effort, causes anxiety)?
- What kind of environment do you prefer (cluttered, minimalist, loud, quiet)? How much can you change that, or manage it (e.g., build in regular time to declutter)?
- Are you a perfectionist? Can you build in time to satisfy your perfectionism or otherwise work around it? Build in extra planning time to avoid rework?
- How much social interaction do you need (even if you’re an introvert)? How much time do you need to recharge after highly social situations?

Remember that your health and moods vary as other things in your life change (e.g., new job/role, location/lifestyle, family/relationships, or health status): reassess your approach periodically and modify what you can.
Setting Boundaries: are you doing too much?

- With bosses and/or clients, set expectations up front or have an honest conversation (ask for their priorities and follow them: fast, cheap, high-quality—pick two!)
- Say NO…effectively (i.e., negotiate, delegate, frame it as helping you help them: you can say yes more often with experience and with appropriate expectations)
- Prioritize self-care and work-life balance: sleep, diet, exercise, rest, and time for family and personal growth means less stress and ALSO better performance at work
- Minimize interruptions where you can: manage technology distractions (e.g., turn off email/text notifications), close your door, tell family/colleagues not to disturb you at certain times
- Do not try to multitask: you're actually doing two tasks separately and taking extra time to switch between those tasks (try taking breaks instead, or purposely breaking up the two tasks into parts and scheduling when you do those parts)

Remember, boundaries and expectations evolve; reassess often.
Planning: organize your time

- To-do lists and calendars as organization tools
  - Make a to-do list for each day, week, and month; using color coding or highlighting to prioritize
  - Divide tasks into a matrix of time-sensitivity and importance (do the red tasks first and the green tasks last, or however you want to color code it):
    | Important and urgent | Urgent but not important |
    |----------------------|--------------------------|
    | Important but not urgent | Not urgent or important |
  - “Important but not urgent” tasks (e.g., professional development) may require scheduling time to do them rather than simply placing them on a to-do list so they are not overlooked
  - Or, keep a running list of little things you can do when you have, say, 30 minutes until a meeting or appointment
  - If to-do lists overwhelm you, try time-boxing instead (schedule your tasks for specific times): this ensures that difficult tasks and “important but not urgent” tasks get done, can prevent interruptions from colleagues (when shared calendars are used), provides a record of what you did, and prevents you from spending too much time on one task
  - For multiple projects, generate a document (e.g., Word or Excel) showing the status of each project (who it’s with, what follow-up is needed, when it’s due)

- Keep track of how long you spend on certain tasks—you might be surprised at what is chewing up your time; you can then put time limits on these tasks
- Assess each project and estimate how much time to allocate, including breaks
- Consider breaking up each project into tasks and tackling them one at a time, or even scheduling when you do specific tasks within the project
- Build in extra time for setbacks, especially if deadlines stress you out
- Group together similar tasks, especially short tasks, so that you can take advantage of your brain’s momentum
- Use tools, apps, and shortcuts (see “crowd-sourced tools” below)
  - Use technology as you’re comfortable; if technology scares you, aim to be a middle adopter, and regardless of your comfort level, schedule time as needed to learn new technology up front
  - Sometimes simple tools work best (e.g., spreadsheets, post-it notes, timers)
  - Know your Word shortcuts and reassess often
Staying On Task: slay the procrastination monster

- Take breaks as you need them, without guilt, and include them in your schedule/list
- Maximize your breaks: take them at unproductive times of day, do completely different tasks during them (e.g., housework or errands, things that require activity/outdoors/social interaction rather than sitting at a desk)
- Include easy tasks on your schedule or list to stay motivated (and cross off easy tasks so you have the satisfaction of seeing something crossed off…unless a long list overwhelms you out or the clutter bothers you)
- Schedule the hardest tasks for your most productive hours and vice versa, and use deadlines within the day to stay focused
- Make your work easier to access and your procrastination crutches harder to lean on (e.g., put software icons on an easy access toolbar and use an extra-long password for social media that is not stored in your browser)
- Make it a game, or reward yourself for completing tasks (see “crowd-sourced tools” below)
- If you have found time, start on the next task—that one could go wrong, too (but, if you’re ahead of schedule, remember that you don’t HAVE to return it early!)

Working With Others: avoid colleague/client sabotage

- Keep meetings on track
  - Always have an agenda, even when meeting with just one person
  - Be that cranky “stay on task” guy or gal, especially if you’re leading the meeting (if you’re not leading, ask questions or ask to repeat something to get things back on track)
  - OR, factor in tangential conversation when scheduling or planning for meetings, especially for team or client relationship-building
- Think about the most efficient communication tool for the job: email, phone, text, or in person (or email/text to request a phone call or conversation)
- If a colleague/client is notorious for calling everything “urgent,” probe to see if you can get a sense of when they really need it, or ask them to prioritize if they’ve handed you more than one task
- If a colleague/client is notoriously late getting things to you, give them “fake” deadlines ahead of your real deadline
- Cultivate a reputation for being reliable and it will be easier to say no or delay deadlines, because others will trust that you’ll get it done when you say you will
Crowd-sourced tools and apps to try (compiled from Engage, fall 2019)

Minimizing distractions/procrastination
- Forest (iOS): a game that encourages you to not use your phone (it grows a tree that dies if you look at your phone)
- Habitica (iOS): a game that helps you develop daily habits (win points for doing a task, go on “quests” where you defeat villains, buy rewards)
- RescueTime (Chrome browser): keeps track of how much time you spend on certain tasks
- Workplace Moods Channels on AccuRadio (https://www.accuradio.com/); for example, listen to classical and jazz for focused work such as editing, dance/heavy beat for repetitive tasks, uplifting music for a dull mood, heavy metal for waking up, relaxing new age for calming down at the end of the day
- Use aromatherapy or practice mindfulness (e.g., meditation, yoga, tai chi)—even three deep breaths during a 5-minute break can help you focus a little better

Organization
- Todoist (iOS): a to-do list manager
- OneNote: for organizing random information or notes; can be used for to-do lists, knowledge bases; uses “notebooks” and “folders” to organize and subcategorize
- Google Calendar: can color code different calendars for different clients
- GSuite: use the Outlook plugin to integrate with google calendars (also cloud storage, allows sharing large files)
- Freshbooks: time tracking and invoicing
- Keep current projects easy to access (e.g., “quick access” function in Windows Explorer)
- Outlook calendar: can be used for time-boxing, and can be shared among team members

Time-saving
- In Word, use templates, macros, and shortcuts; use comments to make notes to yourself about things to address next time you open the file
- EndNote and Mendeley: reference management software
- PerfectIt: document formatting/very basic copy editing